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Ensuring effective preparations for the 10-year review of progress achieved in the Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21

Report of the Secretary-General**

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* A/55/150.

** Submissions from organizations, agencies and programmes within the United Nations system had to be incorporated in the report.

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I. Background

1. In resolution S/19-2 of 28 June 1997 the General Assembly decided that the next comprehensive review and assessment of progress made in the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) would be carried out in the year 2002, 10 years after the Conference.

2. In resolution 53/188 of 15 December 1998 the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it for consideration at its fifty-fifth session a report on possible ways and means of ensuring effective preparations for the 10-year review.

3. The Commission on Sustainable Development, in its decision 7/9,[1] requested the Secretary-General to present a preliminary report for initial discussion at its eighth session containing, inter alia, suggestions on the form, scope and nature of the preparatory process for the 10-year review, with a view to providing guidance to the Secretary-General in preparing his report to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session.

4. In resolution 54/218 of 22 December 1999 the General Assembly invited the Secretary-General, while preparing the report requested by it in resolution 53/188, to take into account the preliminary discussions held by the Commission at its eighth session and by the Economic and Social Council, and to include in that report proposals for the analytical reports to be prepared for the review process.

5. The Commission, at its eighth session, adopted decision 8/1, entitled "Preparations for the 10-year review of progress achieved in the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development".[2] In paragraph (h) of the decision, the Commission requested the Secretary-General, in preparing his report on the review to be submitted to the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, to take fully into account the views expressed during the Commission's high-level segment on preparations for the review and the recommendations of the Commission at its eighth session, and to include in his report further information on specific activities and actions undertaken and planned in the United Nations system in support of the preparatory process.

6. The sixth special session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which met in Malmo from 29 to 31 May 2000, resulted in the adoption of the Malmo Ministerial Declaration. The Declaration, inter alia, identified a number of major environmental challenges of the twenty-first century and underscored that Governments and UNEP have a major role to play in ensuring that the environmental dimension of sustainable development is fully considered in the 10-year review.

7. In paragraph (o) of the above-mentioned decision 8/1, the Commission invited the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session to decide on the agenda, possible main themes, timing and venue of the 2002 event and the number of intergovernmental preparatory meetings and other organizational and procedural matters related to the event, including the clarification of the term "UNCED-related conventions", taking into account the views of the Commission, the Governing Council of UNEP and the Economic and Social Council.

II. Recommendations and suggestions on the organization of the 10-year review

8. The Commission, during the high-level segment and in the recommendations made at its eighth session, underscored the political importance of the forthcoming 10-year review. Presentations and interventions emphasized that the review process could have the potential of increasing the level of commitment to sustainable development by Governments and civil society partners. The Commission recommended that the review should result in action-oriented decisions and renewed political commitment and support for sustainable development.

A. General considerations

9. The Commission stressed that Agenda 21 should not be re-negotiated. Agenda 21 should also constitute the framework in which the other outcomes of UNCED are reviewed and new challenges and opportunities that have emerged since UNCED are addressed. The Commission recommended that the review focus on areas where further effort is needed to implement Agenda 21 and the other outcomes of UNCED and that

measures be identified for further implementation, including sources of funding.

10. While recognizing that specific decisions on the preparatory process will be determined by the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session, the Commission invited early preparations at the local, national and regional levels, which should commence immediately after the conclusion of the Commission's eighth session. The Commission also invited the United Nations Secretariat, working in close cooperation with UNEP, the regional commissions, the secretariats of the UNCED-related conventions and other relevant organizations, agencies and programmes within and outside the United Nations system, including international and regional financial institutions, to support preparatory activities, in particular at the national and regional levels, in a coordinated and mutually reinforcing way.

11. Governments, at the high-level segment, stressed that the 2002 review should benefit, to the extent possible, from the preparations and outcomes of the review processes of other relevant major United Nations conferences that took place after UNCED. The review should also benefit from the high-level consultations on financing for development that will take place in the year 2001.

B. Scope, nature and venue of the 2002 event

12. Governments, at the high-level segment, expressed the views that the 10-year review should be considered an opportunity to mobilize the political support of the international community for the further implementation of Agenda 21 and other outcomes of UNCED. Thus, the 2002 event should provide for high political visibility and attract participation at the highest possible political level.

13. The Commission recommended that the General Assembly give consideration to organizing the 2002 review as a summit-level event, to be held outside United Nations Headquarters, preferably in a developing country.

C. Goals and focus

14. Governments, at the high-level segment, recognized the need for establishing clear goals for the 2002 event in order to ensure a meaningful outcome and to emphasize the political importance of the event in the eyes of the public at large and high-level policy makers. Such goals could include:

(a) A global commitment to a renewed North/South partnership and a higher level of international solidarity to further promote sustainable development;

(b) The adoption of a focused and forward-looking agenda for an effective and efficient follow-up to the 10-year review, including a strengthening of the institutional capacity of the United Nations system and a future programme of work for the Commission.

15. Governments were of the view that the agenda of the 2002 event should be focused and action-oriented, which would greatly facilitate the preparatory process, provide a point of departure for addressing priorities and new challenges in the field of sustainable development, and allow for substantive and forward-looking results.

16. Various issues on which the agenda of the 2002 event could be focused were suggested, such as poverty and sustainable development; climate change; biodiversity, including biosafety; the protection and sustainable management of water resources; energy; sustainable forest management; access to financial resources and technology; education; distributional equity; and environmental security.

D. Issues related to participation and funding

17. The Commission stressed that the preparatory meetings and the 2002 event itself should be transparent and provide for effective participation and contributions from Governments, the United Nations system, other regional and international organizations, including financial institutions, and the secretariats of the UNCED-related conventions. They should also provide for contributions from and the active participation of major groups, as defined by Agenda 21, consistent with the rules and regulations established by the United Nations for the participation of major groups in intergovernmental processes.

18. The Commission recognized that financing was critical to adequate participation and involvement of developing countries in the preparatory process and during the 2002 event. It, therefore, recommended that the necessary steps be taken to establish a trust fund and urged international and bilateral donors to support preparations for the review through voluntary contributions and to support participation of representatives from developing countries in the regional and international preparatory processes and the 2002 event itself. The Commission also encouraged voluntary contributions to support the participation of major groups from developing countries in the preparatory processes and the 2002 event.

III. Recommendations and suggestions for ensuring effective preparations for the 10-year review

19. The Commission stressed the importance of early and effective preparations for the review at the local, national, regional and international levels by Governments and the United Nations system, so as to ensure high-quality contributions to the review process. The Commission encouraged effective contributions from, and the involvement of, all major groups.

20. Governments, at the high-level segment, stressed that links should be established between national and regional preparations, so as to ensure that national preparatory activities effectively contribute to regional preparatory processes. The outcomes of national and regional preparations should inform the global preparatory process, including intergovernmental preparatory meetings.

A. National and regional preparatory processes

1. Recommendations and suggestions

21. The Commission invited all Governments to commence national preparations as early as possible. Participatory processes could be established, including processes in the form of national preparatory committees consisting of representatives of Governments, major groups, professional associations, the media and other partners, with a view to facilitating a coordinated process at the country level and linkages with regional preparatory processes. It was noted that the National Councils for Sustainable Development, or their equivalents, could play an important role in facilitating national preparations.

22. The Commission agreed that the national reports that have been prepared by Governments since 1992 on national implementation of Agenda 21 and to which major groups have contributed could provide a fair basis for guiding the national preparatory processes.

23. Governments, at the high-level segment, stressed that regional preparatory processes should be established to determine, based on the outcomes of national preparations, regional priorities and new initiatives for the further implementation of Agenda 21. Regional institutions, including the regional commissions, could greatly facilitate regional preparations. It was noted that the development of a common format for regional preparations would be useful in order to promote greater comparability of reviews and assessments undertaken.

24. The Commission, while allowing for the originality of regional contributions, agreed that a certain uniformity was needed in regional processes. The Commission also underscored the importance of using the high-level intergovernmental process that exists at the regional level.

2. Specific initiatives undertaken and planned in the United Nation system

25. The Secretariat, working closely with national Governments and using information contained in national reports submitted to the Commission, is preparing country profiles which would provide comprehensive and updated information on a large number of the main thematic areas of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21.[3] In addition, the Secretariat has prepared a questionnaire specifically designed for assisting countries in highlighting the main areas of progress made in sustainable development at the national level and indicating the main problems encountered and challenges ahead.

26. For the purpose of creating incentives that would enhance a stimulating and participatory environment for preparations at the national and local levels, the Secretariat is inviting all countries to launch the following three initiatives:

(a) 101 ways to promote sustainable development;

(b) Sustainable development visions for the twenty-first century;

(c) Children's Agenda 21 posters;

(d) The general objective of these initiatives is to enhance greater participation and interaction among national and local authorities, major groups and the media. Participating countries are invited to submit information on the launching and implementation of these and other initiatives to the Secretariat, so that it can be compiled and made available to regional and intergovernmental preparatory meetings.

27. In response to paragraph (f) of Commission decision 8/1, in which the Commission invited the United Nations Secretariat to support preparatory activities, in particular at the national and regional levels, the Secretariat organized a consultative meeting with senior representatives of UNEP regional offices and the regional commissions. Participants at the meeting concluded that it would be useful if regional preparatory meetings took place from March to November 2001, so as to allow them to benefit, to the extent possible, from national assessments and relevant national and subregional activities and to make their own timely contribution to the international intergovernmental process. Regional preparatory meetings would undertake regional reviews and assessments of progress made in sustainable development and formulate, based on the regional assessments, regional "platforms" that would outline key policy issues, priorities and follow-up actions. Consideration should be given, where appropriate, to the organization of subregional preparatory meetings.

28. The participants agreed that UNEP, the regional commissions and the Department for Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat would collaborate to ensure that the results of important international and regional studies and assessments undertaken in the context of the 2002 review (e.g., the Third Global Environment Outlook (GEO-III), the Global International Waters Assessment (GIWA), and economic and social reports and surveys) would be brought to the attention of regional preparatory meetings.

29. The Department, in collaboration with the regional commissions and UNEP, is planning to organize regional Agenda 21 round tables. The purpose would be to take advantage of the significant additional expertise that is available from independent experts and representatives of major groups who have political and practical experience in the field of sustainable development and have been actively involved in the implementation of Agenda 21 at the local, national and regional levels. The main objective of the round tables would be to elaborate practical proposals and suggest innovative approaches aimed at expediting progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 and to formulate recommendations for consideration by the regional preparatory meetings.

B. The global intergovernmental preparatory process

1. Recommendations and suggestions

30. The Commission recommended to the General Assembly that the meetings of the Commission at its tenth session should be transformed into an open-ended preparatory committee that would provide for the full and effective participation of all Governments, and that the Commission act as the preparatory committee for the 2002 event.

31. The Commission also recommended to the General Assembly that the Commission, acting as preparatory committee, undertake the comprehensive review and assessment of the implementation of Agenda 21 and the other outcomes of UNCED. The comprehensive review and assessment should identify major constraints hindering the implementation of Agenda 21, propose specific time-bound measures to be undertaken and institutional and financial requirements, and identify the sources of such support. It should also address ways of strengthening the institutional framework for sustainable development and define the future programme of work of the Commission.

32. Furthermore, the Commission recommended that the General Assembly invite the Council to decide that the first meeting of the tenth session of the Commission, to be held immediately after the closure of the ninth session of the Commission, in accordance with Council resolution 1997/63 of 25 July 1997, should be expanded, so that the Commission could thereby start its work as the preparatory committee for the 2002 event.

33. In light of these recommendations, the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session may wish to decide that the work of the Commission at its tenth session be organized in four sessions, one organizational and three substantive preparatory sessions.

34. The organizational session, which would take place immediately after the conclusion of the ninth session of the Commission, as recommended in paragraph (k) of the Commission's decision 8/1, could undertake the following tasks:

(a) Taking stock of the state of preparations at the national and regional levels and within the United Nations system;

(b) Deciding on specific modalities and tasks to be carried out by the following substantive preparatory sessions;

(c) Considering other still pending matters related to the preparatory process.

By the time of the first substantive preparatory session, a certain amount of documentation prepared by the United Nations system could be made available for consideration and possible use in further preparations for the review.

35. The global intergovernmental review process would commence at the first substantive preparatory session, which could take place very early in 2002 when the results of national and regional preparations undertaken by Governments and major groups and the official documentation prepared by the United Nations system would be available.

36. As suggested in the report of the Secretary-General on preparations for the 2002 review (E/CN.17/15), submitted to the Commission at its eighth session, the first and second substantive preparatory sessions could undertake the comprehensive review and assessment of progress achieved in the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21. The result of the review and assessment could be an agreed text for a document containing conclusions and recommendations for further action, including a future programme of work for the Commission.

37. Drawing upon the agreed text of such a document, the third, and final, substantive preparatory session could prepare a concise document of a more strategic and political nature. This document should emphasize the need for a global partnership to achieve the objectives of sustainable development. It should also reconfirm the need for an integrated and strategically focused approach to sustainable development. Finally, it should address the main challenges and opportunities faced by the international community in the further implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21. A high-level segment could therefore be an integral part of the third substantive preparatory session. The document, adopted by Governments at the 2002 event, could reinvigorate, at the highest political level, the global commitment to a renewed North/South partnership and a higher level of international solidarity to further promote sustainable development.

2. Specific initiatives undertaken and planned in the United Nations system

38. In addition to the regional round tables described in paragraph 29 above, consideration is being given to the organization of thematic Agenda 21 round tables, which would involve prominent experts, policy makers and representatives of major groups from all regions who have political and practical experiences in the field of sustainable development. The role of such round tables would be to prepare discussion papers and other analytical inputs to the global intergovernmental preparatory meetings, with particular emphasis on promising policies and approaches and innovative ideas that could foster progress in sustainable development and the implementation of Agenda 21. The thematic round tables could build upon the relevant results of the regional round tables, as appropriate.

39. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs has invited a representative and geographically balanced group of persons with political and practical experience in the field of sustainable development, in their personal capacities, to provide the Secretariat with their views and suggestions on the preparations for the 2002 event, along with a concise assessment of progress achieved since UNCED.

40. Moreover, the Department is currently elaborating, in consultation with organizations of major groups, specific suggestions to facilitate the involvement of major groups in and their contributions to the preparatory meetings and the 2002 event, drawing upon the experience gained in the organization of multi-stakeholder dialogues during the sessions of the Commission.

41. Furthermore, the Department is in the process of elaborating, in cooperation with the Department for Public Information, of the United Nations Secretariat, and other partners, a public outreach and media strategy.

C. Preparation of documentation

42. The Commission has invited all relevant United Nations organizations and the secretariats of the UNCED-related conventions to review and assess their respective programmes of work since UNCED and to report to the Commission at its tenth session on progress made in the implementation of objectives related to sustainable development.

43. In February 2000, the Inter-agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) launched the preparations of the United Nations system for the 2002 review. They included an agreement to involve the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) directly in the preparatory process. The preparation of an ACC statement is under way. The statement would outline the progress achieved in making sustainable development an overarching framework for work in the United Nations in the social, economic and environmental fields. It would also address the specific role that the United Nations system could play and the main constraints and challenges it faces in achieving the objectives of sustainable development and expediting the implementation of Agenda 21 and the other outcomes of UNCED.

44. In preparing the documentation to be presented to the global preparatory intergovernmental meetings, IACSD will work actively to ensure that the preparation will fully benefit from the relevant technical expertise and analytical capacity that are available in the United Nations system, particularly with the task managers for the various thematic areas of Agenda 21. At its seventeenth session in September 2000, IACSD will finalize the format and the content of the formal documentation and agree on ways of effectively engaging the task managers in the preparation of the official documentation, in particular the concise assessment reports covering the thematic areas of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the main policy report of the Secretary-General for the 2002 review.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1999, Supplement No. 9* (E/CN.17/1999/20), chap. I.B.

[2] Ibid., *2000, Supplement No. 9* (E/CN.17/2000/20), chap. I.B.

[3] Resolution S-19/2, annex.